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## 3. CB TERRORISM DEFENCE IN BELGIUM, HOW & WHY

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## 1. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

### a. Introduction

Talking about the way a country deals with the threat of CB terrorism is like taking the plunge : you may fall on the left side or on the right side of the rope, but nobody expects you to make it. Going to much in details will give problems with the authorities at home, talking about generalities exposes you to catcalls from the audience. To guarantee our health and safety in the short and long term, we want to state that all information used in this paper is openly available and that the answer to the question "why", is much more interesting for this audience than the facts, enumerated in the chapter "How?". Indeed, the way we deal (or don't) with this particular problem is dictated by history, culture and actual emergency system. In another time, in another country, this system just wouldn't work. So let's first consider some basics to help us understand the actual situation in Belgium.

### b. Belgium

Belgium is a very densely populated and industrialised country in the hart of Europe: ten million people live on thirty thousand square kilometres between highly developed private enterprises, capitalized on their central geographic location, highly developed transport network, and diversified industrial and commercial base. Industry is concentrated mainly in the populous Flemish area in the north and consists of engineering and metal products, motor vehicle assembly, processed food and beverages, chemicals, basic metals, textiles, glass and petroleum. Between those industrial complexes, administrative and dormitory towns, some rare people try to make their living from agriculture and produce fresh vegetables, fruits, grain, beef, veal, pork and milk. We export most of what we produce and so Antwerp is one of the world's busiest ports. To facilitate transport of fuel we developed a pipeline network: 1,167 km for petroleum products and 3.300 km for natural gas (3). On the surface we have the most dense highway and railway network in Europe.
Reasons enough to develop detailed contingency plans for Normal Accidents.(1,2)

### c. Contingency planning

Disaster planning in Belgium is based on the Seveso directive (82/501/EEG) from the European Community and was implemented on July 11, 1990 by a Directive from the Minister of Internal Affairs.
We distinguish two levels of management: the on-scene tactical level and the strategic level by a political authority.

The on-scene commander (or tactical commander) coordinates five distinctive disciplines:

1. Relief Operations
2. Medical and Sanitary Aid
3. Police
4. Logistic Support
5. Information of the Population

The on-scene commander is responsible for the safety and the coordination during the incident management. Normally this very demanding job is done by the officer highest in rank from the fire brigade present at the scene. He reports to the authority in charge of the whole disaster response.

The person who has the responsibility for the whole operation (disaster area and the areas at risk) is the Mayor, the Governor of a province or the Minister of internal affaires, depending on the level of response needed or on the extent of the disaster area.(4). On this strategic level, the authorities can rely on a coordination committee composed of senior representatives of the corpses involved in the action and every other expert whose presence can be useful. A representative of the army is present from the provincial level on. The General Disaster Plan is omnivalent enough to cover most incidents and disasters a man can imagine. For specific risks, specific plans are conceived, however without going against the principles of the general plan. The most drastic change we ever witnessed, was during a prison revolt where the function of on-scene commander was hold by the officer in charge for Discipline 3, the police. This happened in consultation with the chief of the fire brigade and with the approval of the Mayor.

The persons in charge during the incident are also responsible for the preparation during the silent phase as well as for the debriefings and the updates of the intervention plans in the post-disaster phase.

## 2. HOW ?

### a. Hazard

Can Belgium be defined as a country at risk for a CB terrorist attack? The answer depends largely on the definition given to the expressions "terrorist" and "CB":

Personally we consider three kinds of terrorists: the politically oriented groups with very idealistic members, the criminal oriented groups interested in extortion and last, but not least, the a- or antisocial loner. Depending on the part of this spectrum you are interested in, the threat will be different.

When talking about "CB", the question "What do you *exactly* mean? "is even more appropriate: some people only consider those chemicals known as warfare agents while a lot of industrial products are as toxic and even more available for illegal actions. Those same people link this term to "mass casualty incidents" while it is much easier and less eye-catching to obtain enough agents to harm individuals or small groups.

An objective analysis confirms that this country is an ideal target for CB terrorism: a dense population, a highly industrialised and a dense road network without controlled borders with neighboring countries compile to almost the ideal situation for terrorists.

And in practice since the 1980's Belgium has had no experience anymore with terrorist groups acting on its territory. This group, called CCC, didn't use unconventional weapons. The groups on the covers of our newspapers in the 1990's were either folkloristic or logistic bases for international acting groups (e.g. GIA). Besides this the police had to deal with different incidents where individuals tried to make money pretending they were in possession of N, B or C material and willing to use it.

### b. Risk

Considering the previous paragraphs, what are our conclusions concerning the risks we have to prepare for?

First of all, a person who wants to use CB agents for his terrorist action will find in Belgium all sort of opportunities together.

Belgium is not a mega world power and has no intention to become one. The risk that some ethnic groups, driven to a desperate act, will try to kill half the population is almost inexistent. However, we host a lot of international institutions and commercial headquarters that may be subject to terrorist activities.

Beside the almost negligible risk of organised terrorism, we have to consider the same risk as all nations when facing the loner or criminal with a preference for CB weapons.
If CB weapons are used, the choice will depend on local opportunities. If the terrorist wants to use a considerable amount of CWA, the only possibility he has, is to steel it in our stockpile of chemical munitions from World War I. It is far more convenient for him to use industrial chemicals by steeling them from production plants or during transport.

**c. Answer**

If we agree that the threat comes from loners, mostly with criminal intentions, and foreign organisations aiming at embassies or other international representations, then how can we prepare ourselves for such incidents? We will focus ourselves on the medical discipline, mentioning the other partners only when they influence our way of dealing with the problem.

While preparing our medical first responders, we consider that our worst case is the one where there is no previous warning from the terrorist. To help our people to survive such an incident (as well as a toxic traffic accident for instance), ambulance personnel is trained to make an assessment of the situation from the moment they arrive at the scene: "does this incident looks familiar to me? " is the first question they have to pose themselves when overseeing the incident. If they are not sure about the safety, they must seek advise from the fire-fighters, who are trained for such an assessments.

Leading functions in the medical discipline receive their education and training during the post-graduate course on disaster medicine. In the different modules of this course, intentionally man made disasters – including war and terrorism - are discussed by experts from the police, the fire brigades and the military medical service.

When first responders unexpectedly face a terrorist attack they should have enough knowledge and judgment to limit the damage and to assure the safety of the victims and all those involved. As soon as possible they will be coached by experts who will join the scene if necessary.

The Civil Protection, with permanent mobile units all over the country, has nuclear and chemical detection, decontamination equipment and trained personnel. Every province has a hygiene cell for evaluation of the risk for human health.

The national poison centre is responsible for providing information on the health effects and therapeutic measures to be taken in case of industrial agents.

If CWA are involved, and when civil resources are at an end or not available, the military representative in the co-ordination committee at provincial level is competent to send military decontamination teams or technical experts. The problem is that we have no permanence for this role. However a 24 hoursday service exists for explosives: a team of EOD specialists is always ready to intervene when necessary. On federal level the Governmental Crisis and Co-ordination Centre assures a 24/24 hours duty.

If a certain threat is detected on beforehand those specialists could be assigned to the first responders for a limited time.

This brings us to the delicate point of information and intelligence: our national police has a cell specialised in terrorist threat. It is a division of the Central Board of Tracing in the central headquarter. It is delicate problem because of the international character of our terrorist threat: as mentioned earlier most terrorists encountered in Belgium are imported

ones, as are their problems. Our police experts depend on international cooperation to obtain relevant information on them.

If things really go bad, national coordination of material and intellectual resources will be necessary. In 1950 Belgium created a Commission for National Defence Matters on Governmental level. In different Mixed Committees (COMIX-) civilian representatives of the key ministries and the private sector meet with military experts to find the most appropriate solutions for the crises.

Overlooking our preparation the reader may have the impression that most efforts apply to the tactical level. This is so because of the highly unexpected and hidden character of the terrorist actions we fear. However, another reason is the difference in risk perception that exists between the top and the bottom of the disaster response pyramid. The top level is not at all convinced of the importance of the threat and thus the necessity of an adequate technical and tactical preparedness plan or policy is questioned. This leads to a lack of budget for equipment and training. The question is: why?

## 3. WHY?

As mentioned earlier the main problem in Belgium is the difference in priority assigned to this problem between the people in the field and the higher authorities. This results in a lack of funding for specific equipment and specialists although these could facilitate the tasks of our first responders and protect them.

We see two main reasons for this misunderstanding:

First there is a technical reason: the idea politicians or laymen have of the scope of NBC: most of them imagine scenes like first World War attacks with chlorine and thousands of casualties or a nuclear bomb explosion on Hiroshima. On the other hand we have the technician who sees the parallelism with the daily accidents or near-misses in industry. A better communication supported by realistic case studies could help us clarify this situation.

A second reason and a more fundamental one is the difference in risk assessment made by the managers and by the technicians or experts.

To explain the fundamentals of this difference would take too long, but it is very well developed in a marvelous book written by Peter Bernstein "Against the Gods" (6). After reading this best seller it becomes clear why people with a different background and different objectives will come to different assessments after analysing (correctly) the same objective facts.

Two major factors assessing the risk of a future incident are its frequency with which it occurs and the importance of the consequences if that incident really happens. In our situation the frequency is very low but the consequences may be very serious.

A fire brigade commander will focus on the consequences because he fears losing control of the situation and having to live with a feeling of guild for all the lives he couldn't safe. The politician, on the other hand, will focus on the frequency because he doesn't want to spent resources on events that will probably never occur during the period he is in charge.

A mathematician could bring the solution because the importance of a risk can be calculated by multiplying the frequency and the importance of the consequences (exemption made for all other minor factors). That is the way insurance companies deal with such incertitude. Unfortunately here we face a situation where the frequency is extremely low and the consequences may be extremely heavy. In such a case no statistical program will be able to come up with a meaningful estimation on the screen of our computer. (5)

Because we didn't want to complicate the situation too much, we didn't include the fact that risk assessment is always based on references from the past, supposing that the environment in the future will be identical to the one in the past. In the case of CB terrorism we only have to refer to the world politics before and after the fall of the iron curtain to prove that this stability is a false assumption.

We hope that this few examples prove to you the complexity of the problem and explains the reason why we don't know where to place CB terrorism on our priority list.
Because we want to end with a positive note, we like to announce that the Belgian chemical industry started a so-called "Product Steward Plan". Aware of the possible misuse one can make of their products the industry will try to trace the possible effects on health and environment of their products, not only during their production but also during their lifetime and after their disposal. Is this a start to a safer world?

## 4. REFERENCES


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## 5. KEYWORDS


Terrorism, Belgium, disaster, contingency plan, risk assessment